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Official Records

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Monday, 25 March 2013, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Jeremić ..... (Serbia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kanda (Ghana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 114 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Acting President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held the debate on agenda item 114 and adopted resolution 67/108, entitled "Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade" at its 58th plenary meeting, on 17 December 2012.

It is my pleasure to offer these remarks on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, who is on official travel. He has asked me to convey his deep regret at not being able to join us today.

We are here to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. I would like to recognize the role of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Group of African States for their sustained commitment to this annual commemoration.

This is the sixth occasion on which we have marked this sombre day, following the adoption of resolution 62/122 in 2007. The International Day of Remembrance focuses the world's attention on the unprecedented horror of the slave trade, providing us all with an opportunity to collectively and solemnly reflect on the seemingly limitless scope of man's inhumanity to man.

It is almost unimaginable that an estimated 15 million people were forcibly removed from the African continent in the four centuries between 1500 and 1900. The suffering of every man, woman and child will forever rest on the conscience of humanity. We should all be aware that the profound social and economic inequality, hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice that many people of African descent around the world continue to endure today is a distressing and stubborn legacy of that heinous trade in human beings.

The theme of this year's remembrance is "Forever Free: Celebrating Emancipation". It pays tribute to those courageous men and women of all colours who worked so tirelessly to focus public opinion on the fact that the slave trade was depraved and immoral, a corruption of the human spirit. It was the determination and steadfast conviction of all those people who campaigned for abolition to whom we owe so much today.

It was a long and arduous journey to freedom. One of the most significant steps was the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade by Britain in 1807. A young member of Parliament, William Wilberforce, saw early on what the world did not — the brutal inhumanity of slavery and the morally indefensible notion that one man

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could own the flesh and blood of another. Addressing the British House of Commons in 1789 about the barbaric conditions in which slaves were transported, he said:

> "So much misery condensed in so little room is more than the human imagination has ever before conceived."

Wilberforce dedicated much of his life to securing the right to freedom of all men, but he died before the ultimate goal of the abolition of slavery was achieved. It took more than 50 years before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by United States President Abraham Lincoln. Today, we solemnly remember those millions who did not live to enjoy the freedom for which people like Wilberforce, Lincoln and so many unsung heroes fought.

Resolution 62/122 was adopted in 2007 to create a permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and to acknowledge the tragedy and enduring consequences of the enslavement of African peoples.

I welcome the efforts made by CARICOM, the African Group and the Permanent Memorial Committee, led by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica, to realize the cenotaph to the millions whose freedom was forcibly taken. The Office of the President of the General Assembly stands ready to assist this noble and necessary project in any way it can.

It is fitting that the resolution calls not only for a permanent and physical reminder of the slave trade, but also for a programme to mobilize educational institutions and civil society to teach future generations about the causes, consequences and lessons of the transatlantic slave trade.

While reflecting on this dark period of the history of subjugation, we also need to acknowledge that the unspeakable horror of slavery persists, albeit in different forms, in the twenty-first century. In honouring those people who worked for the emancipation of enslaved peoples, let us work to protect and promote human rights today. Forced labour and child labour, the trafficking of persons, the recruitment of child soldiers and the sexual exploitation of women have all been identified by the United Nations as contemporary forms of slavery.

Thankfully, modern enslavement is not as systematic or institutionalized as its historic form, but nevertheless its very existence is a grave blemish on the natural law of mankind. It is also in contravention of article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which declares freedom from slavery as an internationally recognized human right.

Such crimes are frequently clandestine, so it is difficult to gauge where and how they are committed and, correspondingly, to take appropriate action to punish the perpetrators and eliminate their grotesque practice. The majority of the people who suffer belong to the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized social groups in society. Fear and the need to survive may explain why victims rarely speak out.

This meeting of nations of the General Assembly, this great pantheon of hope for humankind, must play an active role to ensure that slavery is ultimately eradicated once and for all time.

The brave men and women who championed the emancipation of slaves throughout history are being recognized today. They transformed their strongly held beliefs in the freedom of mankind into stirring words and those words, into epoch-making deeds. I would like to end by quoting one of the world's most celebrated emancipators, President Abraham Lincoln. He said: "Whenever I hear anyone arguing over slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally". I am of the firm belief that those words were as relevant when he uttered them in 1865 as they are today.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to welcome representatives to this solemn meeting of the General Assembly. This gathering is the culmination of a series of powerful remembrances at the United Nations. I thank all those who have made these events possible. I am especially grateful to the National Ballet of Cameroon for joining us today.

We are here to recall the struggle of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. We remember their degradation and deaths, and we teach future generations to remember as well.

This month, the United Nations is honoured to host the original copy of the United States Emancipation Proclamation. Delegations will find it just outside this Hall. I myself have seen the very historic Emancipation Proclamation, which was signed by President Abraham Lincoln. We are displaying it along with moving panels on the horrors that slaves endured and the bravery

of those who resisted. The names of resisters and abolitionists are passed down through history. On this day, we also listen to the voices of the nameless victims. Their message is transmitted in the music and poetry of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. We hear the voices of the victims in the stories and scholarship of writers. We hear them in the work of young people who study the past to create a better future.

The United Nations has many reasons to celebrate this day. Our Charter, at its core, opposes racism and upholds equality. Our activities throughout the world support those goals, and we operate in many countries that still bear the scars of the transatlantic slave trade.

This Headquarters is located just a short distance from the African burial ground in downtown Manhattan. The remains of 419 people lie there. Countless other slaves were buried on this very island that we call home. Today we remember the tears that were shed on both sides of the Atlantic.

This week we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the great poet Aimé Césaire. He once wrote: "Beware of crossing your arms in the sterile attitude of a spectator, because life is not a spectacle." I agree — we must be more than spectators. While we recall slavery's horrors, we must also address the lingering consequences. While we remember the victims, we pledge to fight for equality, justice and peace. That is the most meaningful way to honour their memory.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Chad, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Allam-mi (Chad): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States. Today, as we observe the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade under the theme "Forever Free: Celebrating Emancipation", the African Group joins other Member States and the international community in honouring and remembering those who suffered or died at the hands of the brutal system of slavery. We also join them in raising awareness about the dangers of racism and marked prejudice.

We join in the many celebrations across the United States honouring the 150 years of the Emancipation Proclamation. Issued by President Abraham Lincoln on 1 January 1863 as the American nation entered the third year of the civil war, the Proclamation declared that all those enslaved in Confederate territory to be forever free. That was the bloodiest day of combat in American history. It was perceived as a Union victory that gave Lincoln the courage to take the first step towards ending slavery and promoting fairness, opportunity and equality. Although ratified two years later, the Emancipation Proclamation galvanized the Union's war effort, turning the struggle into one to end slavery as much as to preserve the Union.

The Emancipation Proclamation also made it possible for free black men to join the Union cause. Nearly 200,000 such men served in the Union's army and navy by the end of the war. In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, giving African-American men the right to vote. Although 1 January 1863 was a significant day for the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, it was also notable for something else. It was the day that the Homestead Act, which allowed people to claim ownership of federal land, took effect.

As we honour the date of the Emancipation Proclamation, the events taking place across the country provide the opportunity for the American community to engage in dialogue about the emancipation still to be realized by too many people in their societies, in addition to celebrating the progress made.

Marking the anniversary is a way to encourage a conversation about all the work that remains to be done in order to create complete equality and liberty. The African Group believes that the Emancipation Proclamation remains one of the greatest documents of human freedom. It was a milestone on the way to abolishing slavery nationwide forever. The African Group remembers the tears and the joy of men and women that accompanied that first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. Those men and women, who, through their resilience, hard work and struggle for freedom, equality and unity, agitating for their own freedom over the decades through protests, revolts, prayers and perseverance, compelled the United States Government to declare that they and their descendants would be forever free.

As we celebrate the International Day of Remembrance, we should also pay tribute to the emancipation of slaves in nations across the world. This year is particularly important, with many key anniversaries, including 220 years since France's General Emancipation decree liberated all slaves in

present-day Haiti. It is 180 years since the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 ended slavery in Canada, the British West Indies and the Cape of Good Hope. The Indian Slavery Act of 1843 was signed 170 years ago. Slavery was also abolished in France 165 years ago, in Argentina 160 years ago, in the Dutch colonies 150 years ago and in Brazil 125 years ago.

For us as Africans and for people of African descent, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are crimes against humanity. They represent a painful legacy of abuse, discrimination and exploitation. Slavery remains one of the most horrific and brutal chapters in the history of humankind. Its scars on the continent and in the diaspora are deep, taking the form of social and economic inequality, intolerance, racism, exclusion and discrimination. The transatlantic slave trade must never be repeated or forgotten. We value the wisdom of events such as this to act as both a reminder and a warning.

The African Group believes that much more remains to be done to ensure not only that the slave trade of the past is not repeated but also that its modern equivalents in the form of human trafficking and sex slavery do not take root. We therefore appeal for the implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat on Trafficking in Persons (resolution 64/293), the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, its review and its tenth anniversary.

The African Group reaffirms its support for and commitment to sustaining a lasting outreach effort in the erection of a permanent memorial to and in remembrance of the victims of slavery and the slave trade. We further recognize the importance and the necessity of sustained voluntary contributions in order to achieve the goal of erecting the permanent memorial in a timely manner. In that regard, the African Group would like to thank and congratulate all those countries that have contributed to that worthy project. We invite other nations to do so too.

In conclusion, the African Group would like to commend the joint efforts since 2007 of the steering committee, comprising States members of the African Group and the Caribbean Community together with staff of the Department of Public Information, to mark the annual commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We also commend international community's contribution to that goal.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Qatar, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Laram (Qatar): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States. I would like to thank the steering committee of States members of the Caribbean Community and the African Group and the United Nations Secretariat for their hard work in organizing the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This occasion is an important opportunity to educate and to remind the international community and, more important, our youth about the importance of the Day. A tribute is also due to those who have worked hard and continue to exert great efforts to abolish the various forms of modern-day slavery around the world.

About 17 million people were transported against their will from Africa to North, Central and South America during the sixteenth century and up until the nineteenth century. Millions more died while being transported to the Americas. As we remember the transatlantic slave trade that took the lives of more than 15 million men, women and children, let us also honour those persons who demonstrated great courage and moral conviction in resisting and fighting for justice.

An estimated 2.5 million people are victims of contemporary forms of slavery. Men, women and children fall into the hands of traffickers and find themselves enslaved in forced labour and sexual exploitation. As we reflect on the injustices and tragedy of the past, let us also take a moment to recognize the forms of slavery that persist in our world today and honour the victims of the transatlantic slave trade by redoubling our efforts to protect the rights and dignity of all persons and dedicate greater commitment to the elimination of today's slave-like practices, including human trafficking, intolerance, xenophobia, racial discrimination, forced labour and related injustice.

In closing, new generations must be made conscious of the commitment necessary to move past all forms of slavery so that we can begin celebrating the theme of this year's commemoration, "Forever Free".

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Grenada, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Ms. Williams (Grenada): The delegation of Grenada has the honour to speak on behalf of the

Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) on the 2013 observance of the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, under the theme: "Forever Free: Celebrating Emancipation".

On this day each year, this body pays its respects to those who were forcibly taken from their homes and families against their will and transported across the Atlantic Ocean under the most inhumane conditions known to humankind. The Atlantic Ocean became the final resting place of thousands of souls who perished along the way. Those who survived this infamous horror, known as the Middle Passage, landed in ports throughout Latin America and the Caribbean into an existence of forced labour and systemic cruelty which lasted for generations. In large measure, entire economies in much of what is now known as the developed world were literally built on the backs of this involuntary African labour. May such an acknowledged crime against humankind never be repeated in any form or manifestation in any part of our globe.

Emerging from this unparalleled tragedy in the history of our planet was the liberation of the many African men, women and children who had endured the torment, torture and attempted dehumanization and who fought against considerable odds to gain their freedom. Those persons and their descendants — people like myself — are those who the great Jamaican thinker Bob Marley referred to as "the survivors".

Yet the struggle for full and absolute emancipation remains a continuing endeavour and reparations are necessary to fully heal humankind from the brutality of the period when chattel slavery was forced and perpetuated upon a particular segment of humankind.

Part of this emancipation, this freedom, was achieved first in Haiti in 1804. That set in motion the movement for freedom from bondage in other parts of the Caribbean and our wider Latin American region, as well as in North America, Europe and beyond. At this juncture, we cannot lose sight of the fact that in a number of regions, including the subregion of the Caribbean, emancipation ushered in the era of colonialism, which in many respects merely perpetuated a refined form of what had formerly prevailed. Thus, the anti-colonial struggle was born, in earnest, as a logical outgrowth of the anti-slavery emancipation struggle and serves as a constant reminder that full emancipation did not end with the abolition of chattel slavery.

The Group of Latin America and the Caribbean States takes note of the August 2012 report of the Secretary-General (A/67/255), which outlines the implementation of the outreach programme and steps to enhance global awareness of the activities associated with the commemoration. In that connection, we express our appreciation to the Department of Public Information for the organization of the historical briefing held last year. We also recall the successful exhibit here at United Nations Headquarters in conjunction with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Yale University Press, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and many other institutions.

We further commend the organizers for the 2012 showing of the documentary film on post-emancipation slavery, the broadcast of radio programmes on the slave trade and the student video conference, which made connections among young people whose societies were linked to the transatlantic slave trade and some that were not. We wish to also acknowledge with admiration the important work of UNESCO with its successful "Slave Route Project: resistance, freedom, heritage" and, most recently, with the production of the educational film *A Story Not to Be Forgotten*. GRULAC wishes to thank UNESCO.

We are especially appreciative of the events this year, including the panel discussion with eminent scholars, including Ms. Françoise Vergès and Mr. Ali Mazrui. We are grateful for the global student video conference again this year, the film screening of the movie *Lincoln*, the presentation and book signing, the cultural and culinary evening, and the dynamic concert last Friday night.

At the national level in our countries, a number of initiatives have been undertaken in furtherance of a dissemination of information on the slave trade and its gruesome historical legacy. In this connection, the work of El Salvador in the integration of the issue of slavery into the social science curriculum of the education system is to be highly commended. The work of Jamaica is to be especially highlighted in promoting awareness of the rich historical and cultural expressions and through the various artistic, literary, scholarly and other programmes carried out by an array of governmental and civil society bodies.

The Group endorses the leadership role played by Jamaica and other States members of GRULAC,

including my own country, Grenada, and of the Caribbean Community, in close collaboration with the member States of the African Group, in relation to the development of the permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. In that connection, the member States of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States encourage other Member States, international institutions and other relevant parties within the international community to continue and further enhance their voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund established to facilitate the completion of this universal permanent memorial project.

In conclusion, GRULAC member States join with the wider international community in commemorating this important day, which observes the struggle and subsequent achievements of the people who were emancipated. It is indeed a day of celebration, but it is also a day for us to take stock and to deepen our resolve to tackle the contemporary challenges of inequality, poverty, colonialism and more — all of which have their antecedents in the mindset that held one race superior and another inferior. This concept must be thoroughly discredited and abandoned, even in its most contemporary forms.

Freedom won must be constantly protected. The world today and every day can count on Latin America and the Caribbean in this noble pursuit.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Finland, who will speak on behalf of the Western European and other States Group.

Mr. Viinanen (Finland): I have the pleasure to speak on behalf of the Western European and other States Group.

Slavery is one of the most heinous attacks against human rights and human dignity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights explicitly states that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

The transatlantic slave trade — to whose victims we are today paying our solemn respect — is one of the horrific memories of our shared history. The dehumanization of countless victims of the slave trade and their untold suffering stands out as an epic injustice.

Unfortunately, slavery is not only a scourge of the past. Victims of human trafficking are the modern slaves of our times. One of the best ways to pay tribute to the victims of the transatlantic slave trade is to redouble our efforts to end the contemporary forms of slavery.

In addition to remembering the crimes of the slave trade and the victims of all forms of slavery, the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade serves as a powerful reminder that much remains to be done to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We need to use all instruments available. Comprehensive sets of national measures are the best way to promote equality within States. The importance of human rights education and ending impunity are essential in this global fight in which the international community must stand united.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mrs. DiCarlo (United States of America): Today we pay tribute to the millions whose lives were cruelly damaged and the millions lost as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. Men, women and children were forced into bondage. This destroyed lives, families and societies.

The slave trade was a business of monumental proportions. Conservative estimates put the total numbers exiled from the African homeland at between 10 and 12 million. By the time the American civil war broke out in 1861, the largest enslaved population in the world lived in the United States. That period is one of the most painful chapters in my country's history. We acknowledge and honour the long fight for freedom that is so central to the experience of all Americans, in particular those who fought to end this repugnant practice on our shores.

One hundred and fifty years ago, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which removed the chains of slavery and declared all people enslaved in the rebellious States then, thenceforward and forever free. The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery once and for all in the United States. We are proud that those documents are now on display at the United Nations.

The Emancipation Proclamation was an act of justice extraordinary for its time and legacy. Its promises were not fulfilled on a single occasion. Americans struggled to fulfil the principles of our founders stated clearly

in our Constitution — that all women and men would be granted the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In the achievements of the civil rights movement, and in many other ways, the United States worked to rise above the legacy of slavery. We have sought to protect the right of every person to fundamental freedoms.

Our work is far from complete at home or abroad. Today, we are witness to human trafficking, which President Obama has called a debasement of our common humanity. More than 20 million men, women and children are victims of human trafficking, without recourse to protection or justice. Together, we can bring traffickers to justice, empower survivors to reclaim their rightful freedom and end this scourge once and for all.

Let us bear witness to the past in which basic rights were denied, and let us build a future in which no form of human slavery exists, a future in which all men and women can live in dignity and freedom.

The Acting President: Before proceeding further, I should like to consult members with a view to inviting to Mr. Ali Mazrui, Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York, to make a statement on this occasion. If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Ali Mazrui, Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York, to make a statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Ali Mazrui, Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

Mr. Mazrui (Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York): It is a great honour to have been invited to participate in this capacity for this particular kind of experience in world history. I was very grateful to those who extended the invitation to me. I would like to dedicate my remarks today to someone who died as we were to meet for this commemoration: Chinua Achebe, the distinguished son of Africa and Nigeria and a crusader for cultural emancipation.

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by United States President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. The idea was to free slaves. At that time, the deeper standard was not the freeing of all slaves in the Union but the freeing of the slaves in the Confederate States of the South. However, the Emancipation Proclamation began the actual process of abolishing slavery. That process was accelerated with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, in 1865.

The international consequences of the Emancipation Proclamation are also significant. In the earlier part of the American Civil War, the Confederates hoped for its internationalization in their favour. Either France or Great Britain was expected to intervene for as long as the Civil War was simply about saving the American Union and not about abolishing slavery. But the Emancipation Proclamation turned the Civil War into a crusade against slavery. Such a crusade made British and French intervention politically impossible. That gave Abraham Lincoln a freer hand to pursue the objectives both of saving the Union and of freeing the slaves.

On the other hand, in the Civil War on the Union side the conflict became multiracial as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation. When black Americans were invited to join Lincoln's armed forces, approximately 180,000 responded by 26 August 1863. Lincoln would make the following observation in a letter about that time: "The emancipation policy and the use of coloured troops constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion".

In February 1865, as the Civil War was coming to an end, Lincoln was ready to say the following to Francis B. Carpenter, the portrait painter. He said that the Proclamation was "the central act of my Administration and the greatest event of the nineteenth century".

A great part of the abolitionist movement in Great Britain was a case of white folks fighting for the emancipation of black folks. The white activists of Great Britain engaged in trying to free the slaves in the British colonies but, again, it was a matter of white activists and black beneficiaries. However, in the American Civil War, the final stage included the agency of the oppressed. Black soldiers participated in emancipating black slaves.

I would just like to say a further word about the British side of that experience, because the British took the lead in the abolitionist movement on the oceans and

elsewhere. Members have already heard today about the role of William Wilberforce, who was a close friend of future Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger. They became friends when both were in Cambridge as students. However, the Slavery Abolition Act was not passed until 1833, one month after Wilberforce's death.

Today is 25 March. However, there was another 25 March more then 200 years ago. On 25 March 1807, a bill to abolish the slave trade in the British West Indies was passed in the House of Commons in London. At that time, France was torn between the new legacy of the French Revolution and the rising ambition of French expansionism. The French Revolution had aspirations to liberty, equality and fraternity. On the other hand, the French imperial role aspired to dominance and cultural supremacy.

One French colony symbolized both the revolutionary spirit and the rebellion against imperialism. That colony in the West Indies was soon to make world history. It soon adopted its former name of Haiti. The Haitian revolution was an epoch-making event in history because of what it did not for Haiti but for world history. Haiti today is only marginally better off than it was 200 years ago but, in general, its impact on the rest of the world was quite significant.

If we look at the broader consequences of the Haitian revolution, it even contributed to the gradual British trend towards abolition. The use of the British navy on the high seas to enforce the ban on the slave trade was partly motivated by the British desire to weaken France in its economic and colonial ambitions.

The Haitian revolution also dealt a major blow to Napoleon's dream of building an Atlantic empire for France. Napoleon decided to concentrate instead on his ambitions in Europe. He sold large tracts of land in North America to finance his European adventures. In the midst of the Haitian revolution, France decided to sell Louisiana. Its purchase was finalized in 1803. The purchase contributed to the expansion of the United States not only in itself but also by further facilitating American expansion to Texas and westward.

Both the French Revolution of 1789 and the Haitian revolution, not long after, fuelled slave revolts in other countries. More than 20 slave revolts in the greater Caribbean flared up between 1789 and 1832. Particularly noticeable were the large-scale rebellions in Barbados in 1816 and in Jamaica in 1831. Those revolts and the Haitian revolution abolishing slavery in Haiti were the largest slave uprisings in the history of the Americas.

We learn about the past partly to influence the present. There are millions of slaves in the world today. We should therefore learn from the past in order to abolish the contemporary slave trade.

There are also positive aspects of the legacies of the past. Where has the torch of emancipation been passed? It has been handed over to the following: the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., in the twentieth-century history of the United States of America; the legacy of Nelson Mandela, in the twentieth and twenty-first century history of Africa; the new legacy of the first black President of the United States of America; the legacy of changing circumstances in the Vatican, in which we have today the first pope from Latin America, the Pope of the poor, the first non-European pope in more than 1,000 years; the unfolding Arab Spring, with Arabs in pursuit of democratization and popular participation; the emerging presence in the world of China, India and Brazil as new actors in global decision-making; Europe in search of a new economic and fiscal order; women from all over the world pursuing vindication, empowerment and equality; the green movement in defence of planet Earth and in pursuit of the quality of life; and the United Nations and its specialized agencies in search of greater effectiveness in protecting peace and promoting social justice. Those are constructive legacies of the past, sometimes indirectly and sometimes directly influenced by the massive global contribution made by slaves in different parts of the world and the participation of abolitionists. We do not know directly which part influenced which part, but certainly the entire human race has been affected by the slave trade, by the institution of slavery and by the abolition of those evils after they had contributed to economic construction of the world.

Let me conclude simply by wishing all Christians a sacred Easter and all Jews a sacred Passover, and by asking all of us to join Muslims in praying for Syria. Let us join other religions in their joint pursuit of peace.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 114?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.